

Exercise and Pregnancy: Avoid Too Much of a Good Thing

Maybe you exercise three or four times a week. Maybe you don't exercise at all. Whichever the case, pregnancy will likely change your physical ability and capability.

Even for pregnant women, exercise may help to improve stamina, flexibility and strength. Along with keeping your body fit, exercise may help relieve or prevent backache, leg cramps and constipation; improve your posture and maybe even promote early recovery after delivery.

Pregnancy often brings anxiety about weight gain, so most pregnant women want to know how much exercise is healthy and what types of activities are the best. Many forms of exercise are safe when done with caution and moderation. Of course, most doctors would advise against such activities as skiing and other sports that could cause injury to mother or baby.

The exercises you can do mostly depend on the level of activity you were at before pregnancy and the status of your health. Your doctor will likely encourage you to consider your physical fitness routine before pregnancy and from there develop a reasonable exercise regimen. Even if you're having a normal pregnancy, you will want to re-evaluate your activities. For example, if you were running five miles a day before pregnancy, you may need to reduce the frequency or even take up walking instead. Here are some other activities you may want to consider:

Swimming: This is a great activity for your body because it tones different muscles while the water supports your weight (non-impact). Hot tubs and saunas should be avoided.

Stationary cycling: This is preferable to road biking because weight and balance changes occur during pregnancy. Be sure to pay attention to your posture to avoid a backache.

Exercise classes designed for pregnant women: Many health clubs and gyms offer exercise programs specific to pregnant women. You may also try yoga to get into shape without straining your body.

Be Sensible

Following are some tips for sensible exercise during pregnancy to keep in mind:

- Try to work in 30 minutes or more of moderately intensive physical activity every day.
- Avoid exercise that requires lying on your back after the third month of pregnancy.

- Avoid long periods of motionless standing.
- Do not exercise strenuously in hot, humid weather or when you are sick with a fever.
- Be smart – if something feels uncomfortable, don't do it.
- Low-impact exercise is best to avoid jerkiness or high-impact on your joints.
- Most women experience breast enlargement during pregnancy. Be sure to wear a bra that gives proper support to help protect your breasts. You will likely need to buy larger cup sizes throughout your pregnancy.
- Wear shoes that have good cushioning and will give your body good support.
- As pregnancy progresses, your center of gravity will change. Be aware of these changes as you choose exercises.
- Avoid deep knee bends, full sit-ups, double leg raises and straight-leg toe touches.
- Always begin with a five-minute warm-up like slow walking or stationary cycling with low resistance to warm your muscles.
- Follow intense exercise with a cool-down. Follow this with gentle stretching in place.
- Don't exhaust yourself. You will be the best judge of your physical condition.
- Measure your heart rate at peak times of activity.
- Get up from the floor slowly and gradually to avoid feeling dizzy or fainting. Once you are standing, keep moving around.
- Drink water often – before, during and after exercise to be sure your body gets enough fluid.
- Increase the number of calories to meet your needs of your pregnancy and exercise program. Talk with your doctor about how many extra calories you may need.
- Stop exercising and consult your doctor if you experience pain, vaginal bleeding, dizziness or feeling faint, shortness of breath, irregular or rapid heart beat, difficulty walking, pain in your back or pubic area, or uterine contractions.
- If you're feeling anxious about weight gain, talk with your doctor.

Even with its physical and emotional benefits, maintaining an exercise during pregnancy should always be under the supervision of a physician. You should always check with your doctor before beginning or continuing an exercise regimen to evaluate the risks and benefits. And always be aware of warning signs that may indicate you should stop exercising.

For more information and to schedule an appointment with a physician to discuss your exercise during pregnancy, please call Spring-Klein OB/GYN at 281-440-1770 today.